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Committee on Conferences
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Draft report

Addendum

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IV. Information technology

Introduction and overview

1. In its resolution 54/82 B of 6 December 1999, the General Assembly took note with appreciation of the efforts of the Secretary-General to develop and enhance the United Nations web sites in all official languages of the Organization and requested him to pursue those efforts and to develop proposals for achieving modular parity among the official languages of the Organization in a cost-effective manner and with a focus on textual content.

2. Recognizing the importance of parity among all the United Nations official languages, the General Assembly, in its resolution 54/249 of 23 December 1999 on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001, decided to convert three positions relating to web sites in Arabic, Chinese and Russian into established posts.

3. At its 432nd meeting, on 8 August 2000, the Committee considered the report of the Secretary-General on multilingual development, maintenance and enrichment of United Nations web sites (A/AC.198/2000/7-A/AC.172/2000/4).

4. In introducing the report, the representative of the Department of Public Information said that the Committee on Information had asked the Department to elaborate on the further steps required and resources needed for an incremental, or modular, approach to achieving fully linguistic parity. In order to provide the secure base required for the effective maintenance of the web sites, the Department had proposed an additional eight Professional and five General Service posts, at a biennial cost of some $2.5 million. That amount did not include the infrastructure and technical support requirements of the Information Technology Services Division of the Department of Management, nor did it include the costs to the substantive departments of developing content.

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5. Much had already been done to enhance multilingualism in the web sites within existing resources, including the posting of General Assembly resolutions, major Security Council documents and major reports of the Secretary-General, and the creation of new sites, such as that for the Millennium Assembly, in all the official languages. The Department was also redesigning the top layers of the United Nations home page to enhance navigability and accessibility in all languages.

Discussion

6. The view was expressed that the tremendous growth in the use of the United Nations web sites — which had over 20 million hits in January 2000 — was evidence of the great success of the initiative. The fact that the original graphic design had withstood the test of time was proof of its high quality. Although so much had been done through temporary and ad hoc arrangements, the time had now come for a more coordinated approach.

Conclusions and recommendations

7. The Committee commended the efforts of the Department of Public Information in developing the United Nations web sites.

8. The Committee noted that it had now become necessary to consider Internet activity as an integral part of the work programme of the Organization. It was essential for the full multilingual development, maintenance and enrichment of the web sites that each content-providing office include web-specific content to be made available on the web sites, as part of its regular programme activity, and make budgetary provisions accordingly.

9. The Committee also noted that, since Member States had indicated that web site activities should not be seen as replacing traditional means of communication, a realistic and cost-effective plan of action would need to be developed to meet the requirement of linguistic parity. In the event that Member States wished to approve of any new web site initiative involving expenditure, it would be necessary for a written statement of programme budget implications to be presented to the Committee on Information before it reached any decision on the substance.